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UNCLAS E F T O SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 003582

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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AND VIETNAM ESTABLISH  
DIPLOMATIC TIES

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 579

11. (SBU) Summary: The Dominican Republic and Vietnam announced the establishment of diplomatic relations here on July 7, and a visiting Vietnamese delegation discussed possibilities for increased trade, investment, and cultural relations. The visitors scored a modest success on their first try, pulling ahead of the Chinese who have repeatedly pressed for diplomatic recognition through visiting economic and political delegations. But the opening of diplomatic relations with Vietnam is unlikely to have any immediate economic benefits for either side. The visitors requested support for Hanoi's WTO bid, but got no commitment. The Dominican Government may have scored points with its left-wing supporters and may see Vietnam in the longer term as a potential oil supplier, in this country's quest to control soaring energy costs. End summary.

12. (SBU) Vietnam, with an eye on the PRC's diplomatic offensive in the Caribbean (reftel), has scored a modest success here on the first attempt. On July 7, Dominican Foreign Minister Carlos Morales Troncoso and visiting Vietnamese Vice Foreign Minister Vu Dung signed a joint communique announcing the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Both principals said diplomatic relations would facilitate increased trade, investment, and cultural relations. Vu said Vietnam anticipated working closely with the Dominicans in international organizations.

WTO ambitions

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13. (SBU) Secretary of State without Portfolio Miguel Mejia, a Palace adviser with ties to leftist regimes abroad who assisted in arranging visits here by at least three PRC commercial and political delegations since last year, involved himself in the arrangements for the Vietnamese. He told the press that the Vietnamese visit would be "the starting point for establishment of relations with some six Asian countries." In addition to their other objectives in Santo Domingo, he said the Vietnamese visitors would seek Dominican support for Hanoi's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO).

4,. (SBU) According to the Foreign Ministry, the Vietnamese did indeed request support for their WTO bid, but Santo Domingo made no commitment. The MFA Asia division denied a Vietnamese news report that Morales Troncoso had acceded to their request, and said the issue must be submitted to the interagency National Council of Trade Negotiations prior to any decision.

No economic agreements - yet

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15. (SBU) The 10-person Vietnamese delegation also met with President Fernandez, Industry and Commerce Minister Francisco Javier Garcia, Council of External Investment (CEI) chairman Eddy Martinez, and officials of the Technical Secretariat of the Presidency. The Vietnamese announced that they had discussed with Garcia the possibility of his visiting Vietnam and of exchanging visits by business delegations. But the Foreign Ministry indicated no agreements were reached on investments or trade.

The Chilean connection

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16. (SBU) The Dominican MFA said neither side has plans to exchange ambassadors. The Dominican Republic lacks resources to establish any diplomatic representation in Hanoi and has no ambassador posted nearby. For now, relations may be handled via the nations' embassies in Chile. This was the channel used by the Vietnamese to propose the establishment of relations, the MFA told us.

17. (SBU) Vietnam,s ambassador to Chile, Nguyen Van Dao, traveled with the delegation to Santo Domingo. A fluent Spanish speaker, Nguyen delivered an hour-long speech July 6 at President Fernandez,s NGO, the Global Foundation for Democracy and Development (www.funlode.org). The ambassador said this was the first visit to the Dominican Republic by all the delegation's members.

The glorified capitalists  
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18. (U) Nguyen outlined his country,s transformation from post-war devastation and poverty to a high-growth economy, due to market-oriented economic policies over the past 20 years. "Today Vietnam glorifies the entrepreneur," he asserted; individuals are allowed to become prosperous so the nation can prosper. The government is encouraging private business development in the provinces. Per capita income has soared from US \$60 to over \$500 -- a still low figure, indicating that much remains to be done. He particularly emphasized the establishment of property rights for peasant farmers and growing exports of food (especially rice), petroleum, coffee, clothing, shoes, and furniture. Vietnam has diplomatic relations with 160 nations and economic ties with more than 100, he said. In foreign policy, "Vietnam is willing to be a friend of the international community."

19. (U) The Vietnamese delegation also included Foreign Ministry director Nguyen Manh Hung, Trade Ministry director Nguyen Thang Hung, Office of Government of Vietnam subdirector Bui Huy Hung, Finance Ministry subdirector Dang Ngoc Minh, National Commission for International Cooperation representative Le Thanh Lam, Planning and Investment Ministry official Gianh Thanh Tung, Finance Director Dang Tuan Hiep, and Foreign Ministry officials Nguyen Khanh Hoa and Do Ming Hung.

Comment  
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110. (SBU) Vietnam achieved its initial political objective on the first try, pulling ahead of the Chinese, whose diplomatic offensive has been slowed by the Dominican Republic's traditional ties to Taiwan. The Vietnamese also came prepared to discuss enhanced economic relations, but there is little prospect of significant advances in the near term. For now, the Fernandez administration's main benefit may be political, in having scored points with the left wing of the ruling PLD. In the longer term, the Dominican Government will value relations with any potential oil suppliers, in its quest to control soaring energy costs.  
HERTELL